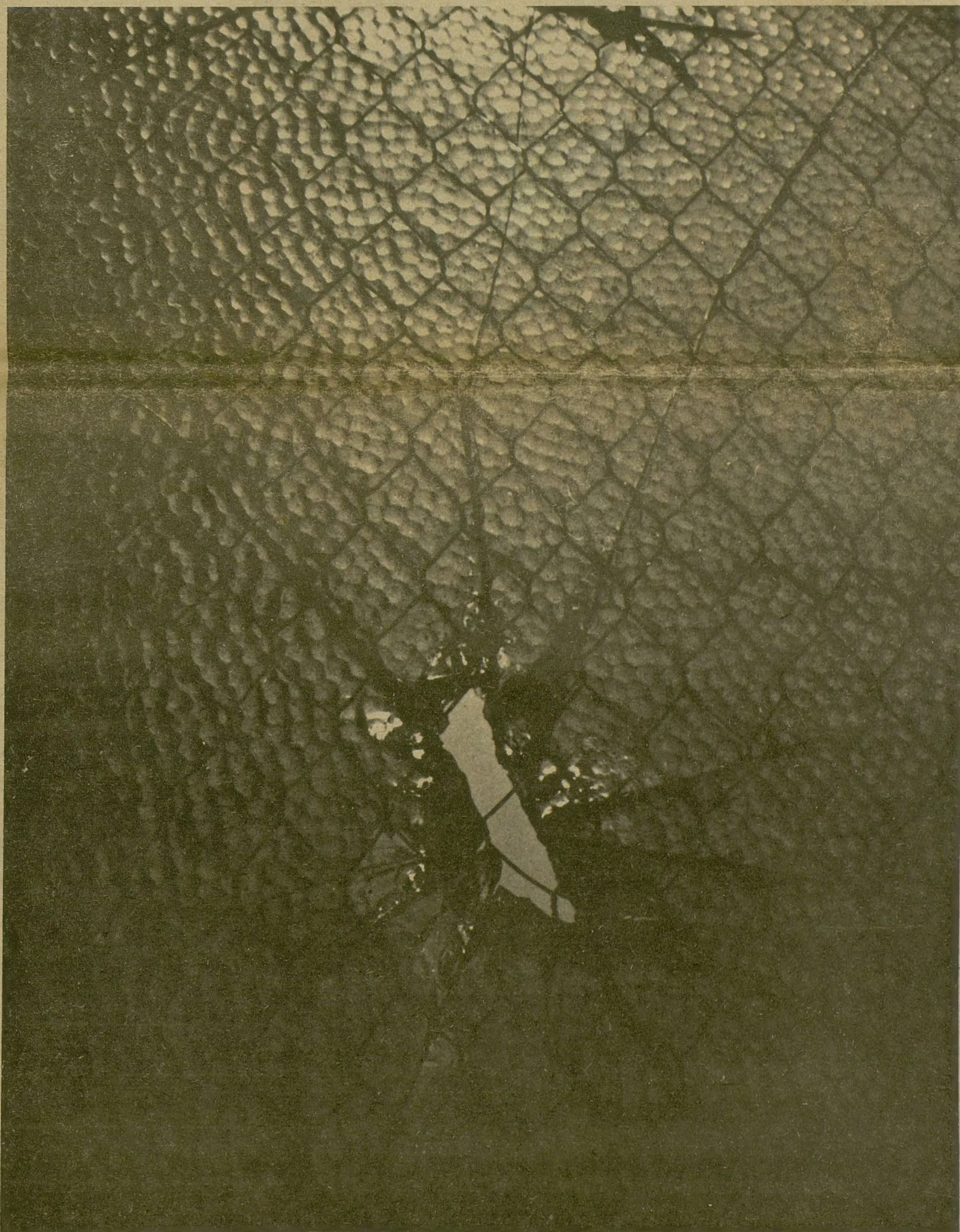


Ain't I A Woman?

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LETTERS TO AIAW

Dear Sisters,

As I write this, I have no particular thing to say and no particular reason for writing, except that I'm so goddam excited about your paper and look forward to every issue. Its the only gay paper I've found that relates in almost every way to my own politics. I read Spectre and The Furies, and at a gut level, since I resent men so much, I identify with their separatist consciousness. But I've been thinking alot about the roots of this fucked-up society--sexism, racism, and the rest-- and I just can't buy the idea that sexism is the primary contradiction. I guess that I've been convinced by the people I live with (my lover; a straight woman (feminist); and her husband (anti-sexist), all of whom are Marxists, that capitalism could change to accept homosexuality and equal rights for women, but that sexism will never disappear without socialism (i.e., a revolution). At the same time (because of that gut-level resentment and distrust of men) I am extremely suspicious of the socialist countries that now exist and don't really understand why even socialist men would not benefit by maintaining control over women. I guess I'm afraid of being intellectually convinced to work for a working-class revolution (which means also working for working-class men) when I feel that I have to work for/with gay women first.

Despite my lower-middle-class origins, I've increased my mobility through a college education and professional training (librarian). I've just been fired from my first professional job, but I can't pretend that my options are as limited as if I had no education and no contacts. I can make some money by writing and could always do substitute work for librarians in a large city school system. I could not handle a shit job. And I could not work with working class women, because I know my middle-class values and preoccupations would show, regardless of my desire to the contrary. What I'm trying to say is, I have to work where I fit best--yet I can't stand liberals and become discouraged trying to make revolutionary change in a middle-class context (e.g., libraries).

In short, I am pretty fucked-up as to what to do, where to start, what context I can work best in. I am very isolated-- my lover and I are the only gay women with feminist, let alone Marxist, consciousness at this middle-class college. We get into Washington, D.C. every week or so, but would find it difficult to take active parts in the movement there. I will be without a job (or, really, the need for one) for a year while my lover finishes school. I am excited to have so much time to read and write and get my head together, but am afraid of falling into an aimless, undisciplined, undirected kind of existence.

I guess I am writing not for suggestions or even support, but just to say it on paper, to know what it is. And, of course, to let you know, for whatever its worth, that I support you and learn and gain strength from you.

with my love and thanks,

Dear Sisters:

I have been willing to write to you for a long time but I never had the money to send for the newspaper. Just today I won the first prize in a poster contest. My poster was really stupid but I'm really glad I won the money so I can have your informations. I was really excited when I got your letter and I really thank you, you are so nice.



"A FINNISH PEASANT GIRL"

BY ELLEN THESLEFF, PAINTER

DONE IN THE LATE EIGHTEEN-HUNDREDS

PHOTO BY JUNE SMITH

I don't like these people here, they are conservative, prejudiced, phony...I just met a black boy I like to talk to but I don't even dare to ask to go out with him because my American mother is very strict and always cares about reputation. My mother in Italy is strict too but we have quarrels and then I usually do what I want. She thinks I'm the one in the family who goes out of the right way. I have one brother 8 and one sister 15. I'm 17. (I hate this word since I've read this American awful magazine "Seventeen").

I'm ashamed to say, in my town in Italy we don't have any WL. I'm the only girl in the Marxist Movement to which I belong. Sometimes at the meetings other girls come but they either want to make a good impression on a boy in the movement, or they come just to see but don't really believe it. Our movement works in the Senior High. (It is two years that the principal cannot decide and act by himself unless he wants student strikes and sit-ins.) We are trying to have more freedom and power to manage the school against the capitalistic propaganda we are supposed to study.

We also work as a political alternative to the labor organizations that in Italy have the most power on the working class but sell themselves to the managerial class. They really don't want any substantial change. Last year was really hot and many of us got denounced. This is one of the main reasons that my mother let me come to United States. My friends wrote that they had a day sit-in on the railroad and occupied the train station. This for a factory which closed leaving hundreds of women without work, when it couldn't close by law. The case was really complicated and we have been studying on the papers for 1 year. We got the original papers photocopied illegally and since even the government is implicated it is a really bad thing, and some press and the public authorities are trying to keep it under silence.

I guess my mother is happy I'm here. I'm not too happy. I want all the papers so far (1 volume) for the \$2.75 and the new ones you can send me for the rest of the money. When it's finished let me know. I'm so excited I look forward to read them. I would have so many things to ask you but I think I'll wait to read the papers.

I have a subscription to an Italian radical magazine, it's one of the most important in Italy. My father got it for me as a present. My father is not too bad, he is what we call a "left intellectual". They don't think too bad, but they don't act at all and are not glad when their daughters act.

I hate the American dating. I'm not used to date boys. All of them are my friends and companions and eventually sexual partners. But I have never fallen in love or never thought that one can be "my" boyfriend. Most of times they enjoy you as a sexual object and don't even care of your deepest yourself.

I really don't believe in love. The rightest and best form of love I have ever experienced with people, regardless of age and sex is a deep sincere mutual communication and understanding. Friendship.

Occasionally I do feel hurt when the boys I have relations with prefer other girls or start relations with other girls. This comes from the education and conditioning and inhibitions I have received. My relations with boys are free and I feel I am free but sometimes I feel my freedom causes loneliness. I'm sure I will mature and leave these stupid teenage feelings. And I really don't see any other way I could be. What do you think of men? Do you refuse men? I don't. Some of them I really can't stand, but some (I have found them only between radicals) are good friends. Since you can have many friends and you can enjoy sex with many people, you can have free relations with many men at the same time.

Here is where my frustrations start. What do you think? Do you avoid relations with men? I know some WL avoid men and have homosexual relations, but I really don't feel any sexual attraction toward women. It is true that after relations with men I feel exploited, even if I do recognize that they didn't exploit me more than I did exploit them.

At this point I'm lost.

My mother also is calling for dinner. I'm sorry I didn't answer right after your letter but I thought I could have money in a few days. Say hi to everyone in WL. Excuse my English. I hope you can understand. Thank you for everything.

Love,



roles, and a woman's strength

Sometimes I think people get too hung up trying to figure out whether they're into roles, when the really important thing about a relationship is whether it helps the people to become stronger.

Last summer I started a relationship with a woman who seems in lots of ways to be very butch. She had a short dykey haircut, is strong and tough-looking; the way she moves is very confident, and she feels more confident about getting angry and getting into fights than I do.

Although we swore to everyone we weren't monogamous we spent all our time together in this real intense relationship for about a month. During that month I started to feel really femmy and un-together and afraid we were into roles. Finally we had to have a big talk about it and our relationship changed so much that for a while I was afraid it was over. But during the next couple of months I really pulled myself together a lot more and started to deal with a lot of things in myself I was afraid of.

A lot of what I thought were roles turned out to be class differences and differences because Jesse had known she was gay all her life. As I got stronger, things changed. I felt less threatened by Jesse's strength as I became surer of my own. And I worried less about whether I was in roles or being classist, although of course I still was at times-- I just tried to deal with things in a more realistic and less defensive way.

Since Jesse was lower class and especially since she knew that, being gay, she'd have to depend on herself (and not a husband or boyfriend) for what she needed in this world she *had* to learn to be tough. Since I was brought up in an upper-middle class Jewish family everybody expected me to snare a man to protect me and my family, to have a maid who'd take care of my housework, and to depend on money or connections to get me what I needed. Being an independent woman in their terms meant getting a high degree and having a professional career as well as motherhood. I tried to rebel against this dependent, stifling role I was being pushed into. But I didn't realize how deep it went. Things I thought were just different approaches to a problem turned out to have their roots in class. Like I would try to get Jesse to sit down and talk out disagreements, but Jesse didn't trust that. She was used to people in positions of power over her talking and talking about things but never doing anything to change them. I thought she was being cruel to me and bragging about her butchiness when she kept prodding me about how I was incapable of taking care of myself and how afraid I'd be without anybody there. But she was trying to get me to become tougher and more self-sufficient. Eventually I understood that. But even when what we did seemed really mean, we still cared for each other -- that was why it was so intense. So we were both miserable.

There were some really ugly times then-- god, it all seemed so crazy sometimes! One night we were up in Maine and we dropped some psilocybin. At first it was nice, just getting off on nature -- a crawfish, a loon crying, colorful mushrooms. Then I wanted to make love and she didn't. For Jesse that symbolized my dependence on her. Finally she started to make love to me, but she was so angry I felt like I was being raped by a man. (That was so traumatic Jesse can't even remember it.) We stopped and tried to talk. She kept hammering away at me about how pitifully dependent I was. I felt like she was so sadistic. "You're trying to fuck with my head!" I accused. "You're damn right!" She answered. I was

sure she hated me. That was all so awful that for a couple months afterwards we were both terrified of ourselves and each other.

But during the last few months each of us went through changes, getting in touch with our anger at this society for how we each were raised and how that limited us. I started getting stronger, more self-sufficient, and tried to express more of my



anger. Jesse found out that at least the people in our house don't want power over her. She realized how much she trusts me. We became closer in trying to support each other to become stronger -- even when that support has meant we had to be angry and tough with each other.

Another thing we've really worked at in our relationship that we feel good about... At one point, while I was still feeling pretty dependent, Jesse got into a sexual relationship with another woman. I was pretty bitter at first and jealous of how into each other they were. I wanted to be close to other women emotionally and physically, but I was afraid of repeating the same intense pain of feeling over again that I lost myself in someone else. After stumbling my way through the beginning of another dependent relationship, I decided celibacy at times is better than fucking anyone else up, and me too, any more. Now Jesse and I both have sexual relationships with other women. We feel good about that, although when one of us is feeling lonely it does make us more aware of that to see the other one getting really into someone. But it's not as though love relationships are our whole lives -- there are other things we're involved in. And the time we spend with each other is important to both of us.

I really feel good about our relationship now, but we've been through a lot of shit. It's not like everything's how I'd like it to be ideally, either. For one thing, although we've lived together all this time we haven't actually made love in months even though lots of times we're feeling very close and sexual and are necking and playing around with each other. We keep saying, "One of these nights." And I'm still not as physically strong as I'd like to be, and am still too materially secure in some ways. Jesse has other things I guess she's trying to work out.

I wrote this down to try and encourage other sisters to really know themselves and love each other. To love ourselves we must be strong.

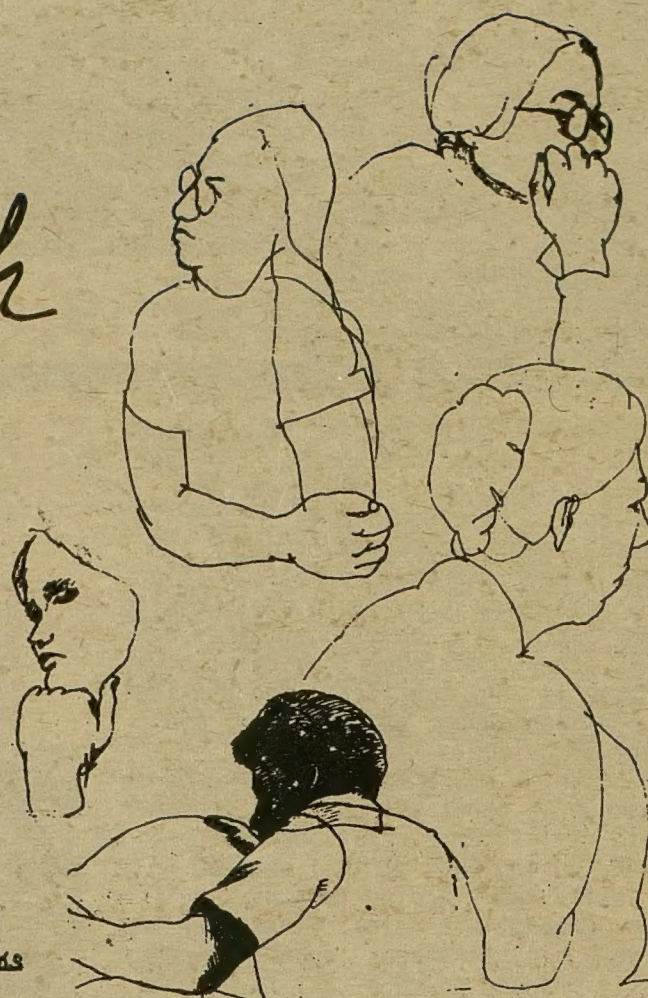


In Struggle and Faith



Dear AIAW Sisters,

Graphics reprinted
from Off Our Backs



We received our copy of your paper with the criticisms of Struggle #1 a couple days ago. It was during the middle of the night that my anger reached a peak and I can't seem to function till that anger is expressed. Question #1. Who the fuck decides or what the fuck is the criteria being used to say who is or is not working class? I called myself middle-class in the first issue of Struggle! because of the fact that I was in university at the time even though I come from a working class family (I think) even though I had just come off welfare and was waiting for a student loan (a government shuck which provides some money at high interest rates--if you "deserve it.")

When I say I think I come from a working-class family, my uncertainty comes in because we never starved, we had clothes, mainly hand-me-downs, from relations and we had a roof over our heads, even if, for the first thirteen years of my life it was too small and in a "rough" neighborhood. We weren't as bad off as some of the families on the block because my parents didn't fight that much. We didn't have books or music in our house--we didn't take holidays, etc.

I didn't know how much we didn't have until I got bussed to a Jr. High school with a lot of professional's kids. God I hated those kids for making me feel inferior and I would be damned if I was going to read "good" books, so I took to sports which was the only way I could last it through school, even though I had to take a lot of shit for being "dykey". So Christ, I got a lot of anger for the shit laid on me by the (upper) middle-class and it was me who put the line about being less integrated human beings. I would like to explain why I said that. I (we) didn't mean to imply that middle-class women are more together but I (we) figure the more shit you get laid on you (oppression) the more squished down you are. The less money you have in this fucked-up capitalist society the less freedom, choices, alternatives you have. We know the alternatives are pretty illusionary and/or shitty. I know you must know this stuff but my anger/resentment comes from being told in the same breath that at least my shit job is not supporting the system as much as some professional job (and we DON'T mean factory owner or other ruling-class capitalist positions) and then that my shit job is "more valuable as socially necessary labour."

I am working again and at the only job I can get--a working class one. And Christ, it is a Shit job. I work in a school library as a librarian-aide, so I do the shit work for the librarians like shelving books, typing format cards and filing them. I have no say over anything to do with me during those eight hours and it is the same shit, day in and day out. The last year I did shit work I almost cracked up (became suicidal) but this year I thought with Women's Liberation giving meaning to my life I could hack the alienation/objectification etc.

I realized that every job I had (waitress etc.) I have had a woman as my immediate boss which certainly reveals the low status of the jobs. It is not going to do me any good to hate the women librarians who make me do work that any grade six kid could do. (Now you are probably going to say I think I am too good for the job--well, Christ, I don't think any human being should have to do only shit work so that others can do "interesting" stuff. This does not mean a middle-class job (doctor, school teacher, nurse, lawyer). It means I (we) want to make a revolution so that all --ALL--work is for the world we want to build/power over our own lives, as opposed to now, where All work supports the system we want to destroy.

Christ, we could go through nearly every criticism made of Struggle #1 in your last issue and say that you misinterpreted what we said and projected your stereotyped image of middle-class women onto it. (like, you responded to us as though we

were N.O.W. women, none of which came from our ideas.) We don't think our position is that different from yours or Spectre's.

1. When we said middle-class women must acknowledge their privileges we meant that we have got to recognize and eliminate the classism that we were raised with.

2. No where do we say that middle-class women can/will make the revolution for themselves or for anybody else. Our point was that the process of developing a revolutionary consciousness is not the private property of any specific group or class, and that every single one of us has to go through a lot of shit to do the Struggling and the loving and the fighting and the changing that is necessary before we can even fucking listen to each other let alone make a "revolution."

3. The revolution is not going to be made either by spending our energy on middle-class reformist issues or forming/joining unions but that doesn't mean women into that are politically invalid. The revolution won't be made either by middle-class women taking working-class jobs which we have been given the impression that some women in the States are doing. When we said we can't/shouldn't negate our class we meant that middle-class women shouldn't deny their oppression--saying my working-class sisters are so much more oppressed that we should struggle for their causes. Middle-class women have their own shit to deal with and they must do it and that includes dealing with their racism, sexism (with respect to lesbianism) which holds true for working-class women as well and class chauvinism which means listening to our third-world sisters, gay sisters and working-class sisters. (That doesn't mean middle-class women can/should expect these sisters to explain/deal with their middle-class shit.)

We admit that our first attempt in communicating through Struggle! --our ideas were not expressed clearly or explicitly enough but before putting us down as not worth struggling with please check out your own contradictions. For example--you say how can one only fight classism when the definition given at the top of one of your pages of revolution is 'A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.'

Another point--we were not saying that we (North American) had transcended the problems of third-world countries, only that we faced different problems such as the broad middle-class, industrialization.

What we mean by accusation and confrontation stuff is that we see nothing constructive in saying 'Christ that's middle-class bullshit' and leaving it at that nor in saying to women who tell us we are cutting off 50% of the population 'You're goddam right we are.' Maybe we haven't had to deal too heavily with this stuff here on the Canadian prairies but I have nightmares lately of reading history books stating that the Women's Movement was coopted by class struggle in the 70's. Maybe we have to be so reactionary to the sweet sisterhood that prevailed at first but let's not sever the cords (no matter how few) that give us a common bond as women. We all know the crucialness of creating new ways of struggling through heavy stuff to the revolution.

We want to see more concrete stuff written about class--stuff we can work with to change our lives and that has not come out in any articles we have read. We've learned by now that men haven't said all there is to say about class--so we need our own analysis. We hope to keep communicating with you.

In Struggle and Faith,

J & M

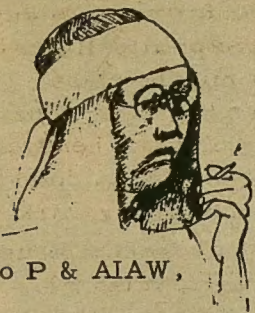
Dear J and M,

Your letter sounded so different than the issue of Struggle we responded to in AIAW issue #4. Maybe we did project a stereotype onto you but it seemed to fit. You were saying stuff that we've heard before from middle class women - stuff that had hurt and wounded. We found what you had written offensive especially to those of us that are working class. Now you have explained some things more and said things many of us can relate to.

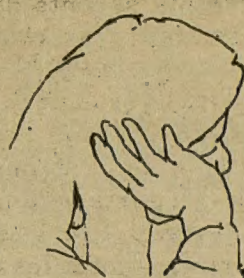
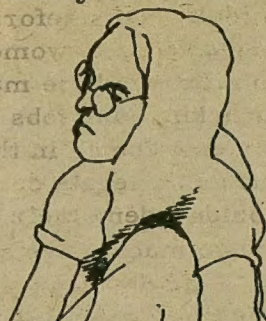
None of us have an absolute formula for determining peoples' class and with women who fit so awkwardly into the standard class analysis it is even more difficult. Still this is a class society and most of us do come from some rung on the ladder and most of us don't move very far from where we came in that context. It strikes me so strange that even though we are aware certainly of at least the general categories of lower, working, middle, and ruling classes and many shades in between all of these that so many of us think if we didn't starve we must have been middle class. There is, I think, a learned assumption that everyone in this country is middle class and we don't question our class position unless it is so blatant - like no food or no clothes. The working class in this country by and large is not starving but as you know from your own background they don't have the advantages and options that the middle class has. Attending a university is one of those options but I think only one. I don't think it necessarily changes your class position only your class identification. It is painful for me to now read your letter and know your background was similar to my own and then think of your speaking to me in that issue of Struggle as a middle class woman. I feel deserted when that happens.

I too have felt beaten down and it has had its affect. I don't argue with you on that. But I really believe the oppressed are better than their oppressors and that for instance the working class has their own values and standards but since middle class standards and values are predominant, a working class person is judged accordingly and will of course seem unintegrated regardless of how well integrated she is by the standards of her class. It's not unlike gayness. Judged by the predominant standards of straight society we seem pretty fucked up but even though our battle scars show we fare differently when judged by our own values and culture.

I want somehow to respond to your saying that our positions are not so different but I'm not sure how. I know they are different and that we are willing to have divisions in political thought rather than forge unity in the face of them. You see, your position can't be close to both ours and Spectre's. We disagree with Spectre on a lot of things and they disagree with us. We really feel they're wrong and prefer that disagreements be out in the open. The fact that both Spectre and AIAW are concerned with the issue of class doesn't mean our positions are the same. I think there is a difference in our feelings about the importance of class - that we felt you were saying more than that you were confused about class - that you were saying it really didn't matter because we



To P & AIAW,



In Struggle,
P. for AIAW

We feel good about our letter and P's response being printed in your paper as well as our response to what P is saying. We are trying/learning to write less abstractly, distantly and avoid the misunderstandings that come from writing that way.

It was good to get a real response from you but it is hard for us to answer you--partly, I think, because we feel that the middle-class woman has no more say in choosing her values and standards than the working -class woman has in choosing hers. We agree that the oppressed are better than the oppressors but this means more than saying shit to the oppressor's values.

I don't want to start relating to women in the male world ways that I see some working class women do either--like some of the students I work with are third generation welfare "cases" who haven't known any other way of dealing with shit than to fist fight even with each other. One of the women explained this to me-- "People don't want to listen to you talk so first you beat the shit out of them and then your friend listens." This is true in Marg's experience, but I don't think that she and the women she fights with created that way of dealing with their problems anymore than my mother "created" the silent suffering soft-spoken non-questioning, hesitant and self-denying way of facing/not facing her problems.

Or the distancing that I see the lesbian working-class women doing at the gay club we go to--where they talk to each other in "safe" ways--"god, you're so ugly its a wonder they let you in the door"--"yeah, well you're so ugly that they were too scared to say no." So hours and hours of this stuff fills the same purpose as the women in the faculty lounge discussing Shakespeare--it still keeps us separate and comfortable and still doesn't let us look at each other or ourselves.

As for my deserting my class, P, I think that comes out of my ambiguity because just like I took on a lot of male values growing up, I took over a lot of middle-class values too, which I see as mostly male created. But here's an example--when I first moved in with J & G who both come from professional families I went through a whole inferiority trip--I couldn't talk right, I was so dumb. I kept silent awhile about the words they used that I

share a main group identity as women. We understood you to be denying the importance of class when you said "A revolution in the 20th century cannot be based solely upon the basic needs of the lower class, for those needs can be filled by other means than a socialist revolution." A socialist revolution seems only a beginning to us, but so long as private property remains the basis of the state and profit motives remain, the basic needs of the lower class will never be met. I still feel that what you wrote was classist but I don't think, in light of your letter now, that you are unaware of class or unconcerned.

I even don't think we totally disagree on the job issue not at least in what we desire ultimately but we still don't think the jobs you refer to are shit jobs nor do we think they (doing them) contributes to the running of or status quo in this society in the same way as most professional jobs do. It is a principle - one that tells us that the oppressed are not responsible for their own oppression. They will have to end their own oppression but they aren't responsible for it.

I know your fear about class struggle coopting the women's struggle but for me I fear equally the women's struggle coopting a class struggle. I think we really have to stop thinking of different struggles as being contradictory to each other. A women's movement based on middle class ideology can only be oppressive to all lower and working class people and a class struggle submerged in sexist ideology can only be oppressive to women. The list could go on forever. Because I am oppressed in one way does not mean I can correctly deny someone's oppression in another way. The whole thing confuses me a lot and I feel torn a lot. I don't think the fear of having feminism coopted by class is valid even though I feel it. Somehow we must struggle to have both, I think -- to have a women's consciousness that doesn't cancel out a strong class and race consciousness. The early women's movement should teach us that. It's death was well deserved because it became so diseased that to win the crumb of a vote it reverted to all the racism and classism it never struggle adequately with. Its real radicals were forced to leave it to its own racist, classist illness. I fear that more - not being able to relate to a women's movement because it violates my sense of decency.

Why do you think it is a contradiction to say how can one fight only classism and at the same time agree that "a revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." The class in question must deal with its real needs that include destroying sexism and racism. Do you feel that the poor are unable to do this - would not need to do this. Maybe I don't see the contradiction because I accept that definition of revolution - that happening as a necessary event and yet know within that I must struggle as a woman. Shit, it all comes down to us seeing a class struggle as basic, essential, needed before or at the same time as a women's struggle. Our politics are changing.

didn't understand and when they didn't make me feel put down I began to ask them what they meant and awkwardly tried using the big words. Now I know the big words and in turn I use them to oppress working-class sisters. Now I know that instead of asking them what the big words meant, I should have asked them to talk in a language that I understood. We've been learning their language to relate to middle-class women and it's time we stopped. It's just like the French in Quebec have been made to learn English if they want to get anywhere in an English-dominated society.

Our sense of destroying sexism--is destroying male structures and class is another of those. As we destroy bit by bit the male world and the male value system--we destroy the class system--like not using big words or abstract thinking/writing and trying to get closer to what we are really thinking, feeling, seeing then we are breaking down classist values that ruling class males have used to keep themselves safe. We see being male-oriented (male-world)--against using the same shit males have used on us that Middle-class women use against Working-class women.

We feel that allying/identifying with the "class struggle as basic, essential, needed before or at the same time as a woman's struggle" as a male-world identification. So if the poor you talk about are women who ally themselves with their sisters then we believe they can deal with sexism and racism but if you are talking about poor men, then no, because just like gay men and black men they want the power for themselves. We accept no group that is not seen as female or male--i.e. poor women, gay women. We keep hoping we misunderstood you--keep hoping that you do see them as the same struggle.

Sorry we lumped you and Spectre in the same bag--just carelessness--apologies to you both. As for jobs--you're right that working class jobs don't support the status quo as much as middle class jobs because when I came out at work and there wasn't even a hassle because even 'a sick pervert' can file cards and paste pockets on library books. But I still maintain that it is a shit job because it is a boring routine that requires nothing of me but the guts to keep at it so I can eat.

In struggling sisterhood,
J & M

A Woman?

March 30, 1972

Page 5

Marilyn is a gay woman with two children who lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She gets ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) to support herself and the kids. She lives with Marcey. WIN stands for Work Incentive, a welfare program to get ADC mothers into the work force. GED is a high school equivalency test. In this interview Marilyn talks about herself and what it's like to be gay and on welfare.

I'll be 25 soon. I have 2 kids, one 4 and one just 3. I don't think anyone at the welfare office knows I'm gay. I don't hide it purposely, I just don't come out in the open and say "Guess what!" The only thing I would worry about is for the kids. Like me, I don't particularly care for hiding things; I like to come right out in the open. But I'd be more worried about what they would do about my kids--like take them away from me. Because I do love my kids.

Q. I'm trying to find out how being on ADC is different for you than for someone who's straight.

A. I think they have more problems than I do! They won't find no men's clothing, that's for sure! Unless one of us starts dressing like a man!

Q. Have you had any problems with being gay or do you think it's this last food stamp thing that's getting you?

A. I think if they had any way...see, it's like they've never said anything to me, and if they did think this and didn't say nothing about it, it'd be the thing they're getting at in a 'round about way. Because all of a sudden, bang--this food stamp thing.

Q. What exactly is happening with your food stamps?

A. They're taking me off 'cause Marcey's with me. The only way I can get back on them, so they say, is if Marcey leaves. And to me, if they all of a sudden say that, because she's been with me over a year and they knew that she was always with me...now that's the thing they said to me, either Marcey goes or I don't get food stamps, which I think maybe is their own way, without telling me what they think. My social worker has asked me personal questions. Never anything like are you gay or anything, but it's been in a way that she could probably make up her own version.

Q. Has she ever asked anything about men?

A. Yeah, like about birth control. She tried to get me on birth control when I first came out here. That was at the beginning of this great thing here with Marcey. I refused it and the social worker wanted to know why. I didn't come out and say anything, though. But she's not dumb. But the food stamp thing they say is because we're not blood relatives. Even with all the other reasons they're giving me, I still think it could be the other thing.

Q. Do you think they would be hassling you if Marcey were a man?

A. I have the feeling they wouldn't. I could be wrong, you really can't tell. They just make sure they know what laws they're going by when you ask, and show you the book. I hope we can get around it, but I doubt it. And I'm sure not going to say that Marcey has to go. This is what they want me to say, 'cause they already said it. Or I could leave and go on my own.

I feel bad for the fact that I have to hide because it's something that I'm not ashamed of and yet, at the same time, to live in the society that we're living in and then too for the kids, I do it. If I didn't have 2 kids I wouldn't have to worry so much about people finding out. I think of them too. Although when they get older they are going to have to be told. But it's alright now.

My social worker got insulted because I said my kids didn't need a man in the house. And other people have asked me if I think my kids will turn out gay. I mean, I'm not going to say to them "Well, this is what your mother is and this is what you're supposed to be." They're going to know that there's two worlds. It's going to be up to them. Because I think that's where my parents failed. I didn't know which way to turn and as I was growing up they were pushing this marriage thing at me all the time and I just didn't know if that's what I wanted. I mean, I'm still a woman, no matter what and I knew I did want to have children someday but I didn't know if the gay thing was the thing I was going to stick by. I went out with fellas and was engaged twice before I was married, but my parents always pushed it on me.

I think that if welfare feels that you're a one parent family that you can't bring your children up right, and this gets me very mad. This social worker wanted me to go to Parents Without Partners Club, I mean, you know, I think I'm doing the best I can and they have the love and attention I think they need and you know, she says "Well you're only one parent and you don't know what you're doing." She doesn't even have any children and she's gonna tell me how to take care of mine!

There's been a couple of times that she's been here and Marcey's come home. One thing I give Marcey credit for -- if there's something said that she don't like then she'll tell them. And I can do that with social services, it's not that I can't stand up but I feel that I have to deal with them and I can't make it harder on myself. If it goes too far then I will say something, but I don't say it in a nasty way because I got to deal with them. They could hurt me. I know they could. They could cut me off. They could make it hard for me just the way they're doing now.

And like this WIN program deal, I mean, I do want to do something later cause I know if I did go back to factory work, it's not gonna be worthwhile moneywise. That's the only reason I'm going to this secretarial school is to make it better later. The deal is that I didn't finish high school and there was a program where I could go get my GED and from there the WIN program came up.

Q. What kinds of things did they offer you on the WIN program?

A. This is what got me mad. They says to me, "This program blah blah blah, and you can have what you like." So in the beginning I had this great thought that I was interested in IBM. This is what I had said. In the meantime they send me down to the unemployment thing, make me take this aptitude test or whatever the hell they are, next thing I know they're telling me I come out high in math and all sorts of shit and it looked like that I was good for being a secretary. So nobody mentions IBM. The next thing they say that there was no place in Cedar Rapids to do this IBM. Then the secretarial school came up. But they never said other things I could do. They just said, "You scored high on the secretarial thing." They never mentioned anything else.

And the thing is, I've never known anyone to finish on the WIN program. And like the woman who works at my school, she says she hopes I finish because it will make her school look good. And I mean this is what makes me mad. They're all looking out for themselves, the hell with the other person, which I don't think is fair. But it's true, this is the only way out if you're on ADC but they should offer other stuff. They just say, "This is for you." I mean how do they know? I can't picture myself sitting at no desk all day cause I don't like it. I have to move around.



Q. Do you know anyone on the WIN program who's doing anything besides secretarial work?

A. The lady who babysits for me, her daughter is going to be a beautician. So the way it looked to me is there's nothing that's really great, the way they're talking. The way they're saying it to you is, you can go to be a doctor but yet I haven't seen it from what they're offering. And I haven't heard of anyone who did.

Anyway, I don't like this kind of work. And now, I'm up to 50 words a minute of typing, so like any time now I expect it, and it's happened to another girl and she got very disgusted. They come to you, you don't get paid for it, but you go down to Social Services and type. You go to school from 8 to 12 and from 1 to 5 you go to Social Services and type up all their papers for them. You know what it's for? For experience! This is what they're telling you. And they had a girl do that and she left school. She wouldn't come back no more. She said she'd had it. Not just because she didn't get paid but for the idea of the way they're doing it. You know, saying "This is for experience." And they won't let you have another job unless it's the field you're going into. And I don't think it's fair. And it's partly my fault because I don't fight her off but I just can't risk it.

And they're always sending somebody. The last time I wanted to leave the program, they sent this woman, I didn't know who the hell she was from Adam; they sent her from Des Moines. "Hello," she said with a big smile on her face, "I'm so-and-so, tell me your problems and why you want to leave the program." I said to myself, what the hell is this shit? I call up the social worker and say, "What are you doing. I don't know this lady! I'm not gonna sit here and tell

her my life story." She said, "Oh, well I thought she'd make you feel better. She had some of the problems you had. Her husband left her and she went through the WIN program and now she's working at this job." What do I care what she's doing? But this is what she does and this is what aggravates me. And my friend who's going to be a social worker told me most of the time they just come to see your house and who's there. I never believed how sneaky they could be but this is how it is.

Q. When is your divorce final?

A. In July. And I'm making Marcey the guardian of the kids in case anything happens to them. The only reason I did that was, it may sound stupid but if I drop dead I don't want my husband walking in and taking my two kids.

Q. What was it like with your family back home?

A. Well, they were rough on me. They were really strict. As far as, you know, we were noted as -- well they called it Lesbian. I never heard the word gay. And they said this before I knew. I knew I had the feelings. But I didn't, you know -- what the hell they talking about. What do they do? I couldn't figure out -- I knew I had all these mixed feelings but I couldn't figure out what they were talking about! Really funny. I think the funniest part was when I got married. When I had my baby my mother came into the

So I had a pretty good life as a kid as far as taking care of me and stuff like that. But as soon as my mother got into nursing she was a complete changed woman. I guess it made her hard or something. And this is when I started getting older and needed that attention. And both of them was working nights and they left my grandmother with me, my father's mother. And there was just no kinda life whatsoever. Nobody you could go home and talk to -- about your homework you were having trouble with or this shit or that. And my father was running around with other women and I saw him doing it. And I used to see my mother sit and cry. And I was seeing this. My mother and father from the time I can remember -- without a word of lying -- I saw my mother sleep on the couch and my father sleep in the bedroom. And I started thinking. I was young and I can remember -- in fact, I asked my mother one time how come they didn't sleep together. You know, I mean, as a kid you're wondering about this and this is all going through your head. I think this had a lot to do with things too -- that, you know, the love wasn't in the house between them either. And it hurt my mother a lot and I think that's why too it had a lot to do with her dying early. So in the end she really started going for pills; she was really on all this kind of pill stuff. So when I was home, like when I was about twelve until I was about fifteen (almost sixteen was the first time I ran away from home 'cause I couldn't hack it anymore), I was constantly taking care of her, taking care of the house and all this other garbage and I just couldn't take it. Every day she had a new ailment. I felt sorry for her but at the same time I was getting disgusted 'cause, you know, every day it was the same shit. Couldn't bring anybody to your house. She'd be, like, in a stupor, like a person being drunk, when she was on these pills. And I really felt bad. I blame my father for it, though, 'cause he never tried to help her. She needed the help more than anybody. That was really quite something.

So then, after my mom died, I had Terri. And then it was like I was in the house with Terri all the time. And if I did want to go anywhere, it was terrible for me to go out -- you know, I was a mother. (This was after my husband left.) That's all I heard every day. Somebody call me up: "Let's go to the movies" or something. My father thought it was terrible 'cause I happened to want to go out for the night. And when Marcey came out she couldn't believe that. We just wanted to go for an ice cream and my father, you know, ran up the roof: "Where you going? You can't go nowhere." Jesus Christ. When we left there I really thought I'd gotten out of a cage. When we came out here we went to the farmhouse and, I mean, like, I was home when I got up there, but I was really free. I took care of my kids, but I didn't have to put up with the garbage I did out there. I said to Marcey, "Christ, it's like being put out of a cage." And I didn't hear from him or anything.

Well, when I had Terri, I went on welfare in New Jersey and I got something like \$210 a month for me and Terri, and that was for everything -- food, rent, whatever. It wasn't food stamps. I didn't get food stamps or anything. And you know, if there was any extra I needed, I didn't have it. So the old man would go out and get like \$25 of food or something like that. He'd go round telling everybody, "Yeh, my daughter's on welfare and I'm taking care of her and her daughter. I'm doing this and I'm doing that." That's all I ever heard, you know: "If it wasn't for me...". And what they didn't know was that when I was pregnant with Terri my aunt had this trucking business and while I was pregnant I went and answered the phone for her. She gave me \$50 a week to take orders and all shit like that. And whatever penny I got from there I put away to pay for P.J.'s hospital bills. That was the only way I could get through it when he was born.

I think welfare back east is a lot stricter. You get more money, though. You have to go through a lot more. They come to visit you at least once every 2 months. They go through your house, your closets and definitely just hassle the hell out of you. And your husband--they'll go to Afghanistan if they have to and pick him up. And they try to convince you to go back to them. That's why I went back to him the second time. I mean, I'm not stupid, you've got someone with you everyday, hassling all the time. And in the beginning I was saying "Gee, is it right or is it wrong?" My father's telling me it's wrong 'cause I'm bringing my kid up without his father. And they're not realizing what I'm saying. I mean I figure, shit, he left me when I was pregnant. He didn't give a shit what happened. So I give a shit what happens to him? But this is why I went back, or I would have never had P.J. Thank God I got him anyway. There would never have been another baby. I mean, when I was brought up--it sounds stupid--my mother never sat down and told me the birds and the bees. I found all this out in Catholic school. And I'm being honest. As far as birth control and all this other shit, I only knew from hearsay what people told me. I never knew that much except for the rubber shit and he refused to do anything about that. He said "not me. That's like taking a shower with a raincap on." And then one time he says to me "if you want it, you go get it." I said "go buy your own, I'm not going to buy them."

And when I went back to him, I tried that rhythm shit and I found out later we did it all wrong. We conceived P.J. that time. And here's my father, you know, this brilliant guy: "Don't worry about nothing," he's saying. So everything was fine when I went back with my husband the second time. Then he left me and I was pregnant. Then I'm pregnant and my father says I'm a stupid ass. Just before that he's convincing me to go back to my husband. If it's not one thing, it's another.

Q. Do you ever think about telling the kids that you're gay?

A. I mean, let's face it. Terri's getting older. If Marcey kisses the kids good-bye in the morning, Terri says, "Aren't you going to kiss Mommie?" She knows. But at least she knows that there's love in the house. It's not wrong, you know. I think the kids should be brought up the same as with a man. I don't believe in hiding anything. And there's going to be a day when I have to sit down and talk to Terri. But I think right now the main thing in her head is there's love in the house.

hospital. She said, "Well, I guess our daughter's OK." Just 'cause I had a baby, right? Christ!

My parents weren't -- well, how can I say it -- they weren't the affectionate type. And me, I'm a very affectionate person. As a kid I was always probably looking for love and stuff like that. It's a normal thing. And if I showed any kind of love for anybody which to me was a decent way -- and this started younger to friends and this older woman that I knew I always wanted to see but I didn't know at the time it was for any reason like that -- this is when they would start. And they'd say, "There's something wrong with you, you're sick." They were going to take me to a psychiatrist, stuff like that. And at that time it was just feelings that I had inside me and couldn't explain them to myself. And then the first time I had the experience, that's when I left home and went to live at her house. I started going with her. Anyway, it was really a nice relationship too. My father came down because her parents owned a diner. And you know when you have a new experience you run yourself ragged. We were working two jobs, having a ball going out, you know, and just really raising hell, drinking and all this shit. My father comes down and he says, "You look like hell. I told you this kind of life would really ruin you." And I was really having a ball and he's going, "Come back home" and all this other shit. And I thought, "Oh my god."

When I was there I used to take care of the house. I was like daughter and wife, and all this other garbage. My mom was a pretty good person. She was a nurse but she was a real -- my father was a very unaffectionate person. And he played the horses. They had money -- like when he got out of the service.



Woman?

March 30, 1972

page 7

On Organization in

By Radical Feminists 28

We (the AIAW Collective) have been discussing the issue of organizational structures within the Women's Movement prompted and influenced by the article below. There are some things that the RF 28 talk about that have not been our experience within our own group nor with other groups in Iowa City and some things they say that we agree with and have experienced. We hope to have an article in the next AIAW on this subject.

The Theory Behind the Paper

The building of a social movement is a struggle, it is not an evolutionary process. Conditions change rapidly, new ideas and concepts emerge and we are forced to re-examine everything in light of our new discoveries. Groups and organizations are born in moments of excitement when we are trying out new ideas. They sprout quickly, then level off to a steady growth, and eventually they die. Organizations and groups die when they out live their function or when conflicts within them become too great to resolve within their structure. The death of organizations reveals the possibilities for new forms and allows opposing points of view to struggle out their differences through practice. Different organizational forms make sense at different times. It is not as if we were wrong to put ourselves into a certain structure at a certain time, it is all part of our history, of the development of our revolution. Every step along the way is essential to reaching our destination.

THE INTRODUCTION

The Women's Movement has experienced the death of many of its organizations. It has left many women disillusioned, cynical, and even bitter. And yet, the Movement has never been more alive. People everywhere are talking about "Women's Lib." Magazines are filled with articles. Even President Nixon has been pressured to explain why he didn't select a woman to serve as a Supreme Court Justice. But if we intend to keep up the momentum of the Movement and to see it continue to grow we must evaluate the past shortcomings of organizations, and begin to build the new structures necessary to bring about the liberation of women. Without this the strength of our Movement will dissipate. In attempting to develop new structures to meet the needs of the movement at the present time, we have developed the following analysis of our past structures.

REVIEW OF OUR PAST

In the Radical Feminist Movement of the past few years, there have been three primary forms of organization - Consciousness-Raising Groups, Collectives, and Women's Centers. Each of these organizational forms has served a vital function in the history of the movement, but we have grown beyond them.

Consciousness-Raising Groups (CR Groups)

The most important function of CR-Groups has been bringing women together-out of individual isolation into a consciousness of women as a social group. When we began meeting with women only, we discovered that our personal experiences were common to most women. Patterns began to emerge. We began to see our lives in a greater social and political context. The personal became political. CR Groups served as a place for us to develop an understanding of our oppression and to question the explanation of reality offered to us by male-society. We saw that our behavior was not "inevitable and natural" but a reaction to our powerlessness. We began to confront men with what they were doing to us and to define in limited terms what it means to have power over our lives. CR-Groups also provided a place for women to bitch and share frustrations, fears and rage, rather than continuing to blame ourselves for our problems.

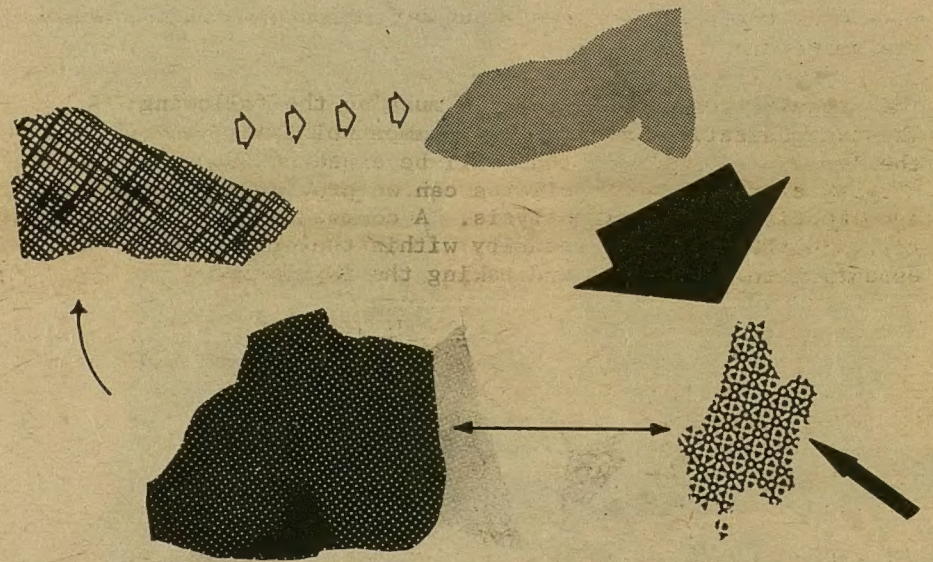
The main shortcoming of CR-Groups was that they were aimed simply at CR. CR had a paralyzing effect because we had no method through which to apply what we had learned. We spent time and energy examining and re-examining past experiences but did not use them to create an analysis of our situation or to develop a theory of how to proceed. Many women expected these groups to solve their personal and psychological problems - to become personally liberated. This was impossible and in fact, it denied what CR had taught us; that is, our oppression is not in our heads. CR-Groups were very loosely structured, usually composed of women from many backgrounds and with different interests. Groups were formed haphazardly. Women joined a particular group because of personal relationships, because it was the only group around, or because names happened to appear on the same list. This meant there was no basis for action or for an on-going group. CR-Groups grew in isolation from each other and most stayed together for only a short period of time. Most of what was learned has been published in movement journals, newspapers and books. We know we are oppressed and have to proceed beyond that point.

Collectives

Collectives were an attempt to go beyond CR, to integrate personal and political lives. They were defined as combination support, action and CR-Groups. Women came together from somewhat similar backgrounds with a vague feeling for the politics of the other members of the group. We began to piece together our experiences into a political analysis and for a period of time, Collectives served as action groups.

The main reason Collectives failed was the absence of a clearly defined basis. The political basis of the Collectives began to be discussed only after the groups had been formed. Some women wanted to have a political basis, others did not. Women were operating on different assumptions, different expectations, and different levels of commitment. Some women had made Feminism the basic commitment in their lives and assumed others in the group had made the same commitment. These women acted and depended on this commitment - a commitment which was lacking from others in the group when it was badly needed. For others, weekly meetings were an interesting intellectual endeavor, like a study group. Some dropped out of the group when it was no longer interesting and more important things interfered. and others developed hostility because things were expected of them that they were not able or willing to provide.

Strong disagreements were apt to threaten the continuance of the group. As a result differences were often hidden under a facade of collective agreement. When differences did emerge, as they eventually must, they were cloaked in personal hostility against other members of the group and were never articulated as political disagreement. Groups just dissolved - often with bitterness. Another reason Collectives were not viable as continuing forms of organization is that their structure forced them to be closed. The only alternative for new people was to start another group. Equality in Collectives meant the lowest common denominator because there was no way to develop the potential of all members. Any woman who attempted to take the initiative was attacked for being dominating because everyone was not taking the initiative.



In the name of equality, Collectives tended to stagnate individual development rather than teaching all women to assert themselves. Our new organizational forms must develop the potential of all women. Only in this way will equality be realized.

Women's Centers

Women's Centers have served as a public place for women to gather and as a visible expression of the Movement. They were something tangible that women could contact to find out about Women's Liberation. Centers provided a neutral space for political activity. Women from different groups could plan actions and services together. Their chief function was providing communication for the movement in the form of telephones, bulletin boards, newsletters and literature. These Centers were also a beginning attempt to develop a non-hierarchical structure. Women's Centers were created as umbrella organizations with no defined political basis. Since they were often the only public expression of the Movement, they were expected to fill all the needs of women. In response to this demand, they attempted to fill needs it was impossible for them to fill.

Actions which grew out of Women's Centers tended to be sporadic and haphazard. There was no collective understanding of how these actions fit into an overall strategy for achieving liberation. As such there was no way to gauge our effectiveness and to use our experiences to develop a direction.

The attempt to create a non-hierarchical structure failed because the underlying assumption was that all women are equal. This was false - a mistaking of our end goals for the present reality. We cannot create a non-hierarchical structure without developing the skills and potential of all members, sharing among us the knowledge we have.

The Movement has out-grown these amorphous structures. Our politics have developed beyond this point. It is now time for women of like minds to form organizations which allow us to develop and implement our politics.

Conclusion

Each of these forms of organization, CR-Groups, Collectives, and Women's Centers have provided a space for women to grow and to think through new ideas together. The very existence of a group has provided a minimal support for us to begin standing up for ourselves and taking ourselves seriously. While the Women's Movement has grown beyond these structures, they have made visible what new forms are necessary.

The Women's Movement

January 1972

THE NEEDS OF OUR FUTURE

It is now time for us to concentrate on putting a semblance of order and discipline into our movement. By continuing to advocate loose, uncommitted groups, we prevent real development of ourselves and of our ideas. In an effort not to alienate the mass of women, we have ended up appealing to laziness, fear, and dependency in women. As a result, a spirit of conservatism is arising in the Women's Movement. Rather than challenging ourselves and other women to move out, to take risks, and to dare the impossible, continued disorganization fosters a lax commitment, discouragement and feelings of uselessness among women.

Organizations are essential to revolution:

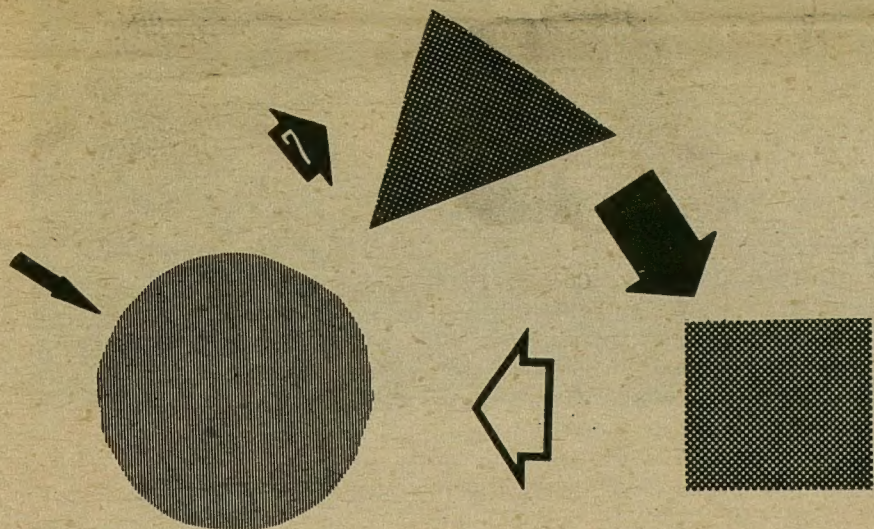
Organizations provide concrete expression to women of a counter-reality - a reality which challenges the assumptions and "truths" of patriarchal culture. For example, it is asserted as "truth" that women cannot function politically together, cannot by themselves develop and execute a plan of action--political action is the sphere of men. An organized group of women, however, exposes this "truth" as no individual by herself could do. The existence of the group itself creates a reality in opposition to patriarchy and people are forced to reinterpret their perception of the world.

Organizations create power by which we are able to challenge the established order. They consolidate the strengths of individuals. When people unite under common principles and act on those principles, they create power.

It is now time to create many independent organizations, each consciously developing its own analysis and strategy for change. They must contain within themselves the seeds of their own expansion. These groups are a transitional stage in the revolutionary process. They will lay the foundation of a future larger organization which will draw together many groups under common principles, analysis, and structure.

The organizations we develop now must do the following:

These organizations must define common political principles and the level of commitment that will be expected from each member. Only by clarifying our politics can we provide the foundation for a collective political analysis. A common commitment is required to build the trust and security within the organization that are essential to moving out and taking the initiative.



These organizations must develop theory out of which to act. Our analysis must separate the bases of our oppression from its consequences. Only in this way can we avoid the dangers of reformism and opportunism within the Movement. Action which is separated from a developing analysis of the whole runs the risk of either betraying real feminist interests now or in the future, or of consuming valuable time on projects which haven't the potential for effecting the necessary revolutionary change. Without a commitment to feminist theory, we will be doomed to continuing sporadic, unconnected action. Only a strong ongoing group can ensure that every idea is developed and is incorporated into its analysis.

These organizations must provide leadership for our movement. Gaining power for women requires taking the initiative. We will never convince men to give up their power and they will certainly not give it all up of their own accord. This leadership must be collective leadership based on the common experience of theory and practice.

These organizations must be a place for individuals to develop the capabilities and skills that will be necessary in creating a Feminist Revolution. These skills include the ability to speak and write well, to create and explain theory, and to carry out actions. Developing these skills is accomplished by both consciously sharing knowledge and by participating collectively in the process of social change.

These organizations must also build strength and courage in their members and develop the ability of members to take the initiative and provide leadership. To do this it is necessary to have the kind of commitment that a serious organization demands of its members. Moving forward and taking risks becomes possible when the group can provide minimal security and an environment of support. Only a clearly defined commitment of all members can assure that support and security will exist when it is needed.

These organizations must struggle to ensure equality among their members. The dominant race, class, and sex retains the skills and knowledge for maintaining power within its own group. A move toward equalization is only possible when specific measures are taken within the group to counteract these imbalances of power. Such measures include a systematic sharing of skills, equally dividing the tedious and creative tasks, control of who shall communicate with the media, and a move toward a sharing of incomes. Only a group of people with a continuing commitment could effectively attempt these measures.

These organizations will provide a basis for working with women of different political orientations without compromising anyone's principles. By clarifying our positions and acting in a unified manner, we are able to cooperate, to make alliances, and to incorporate new members, while at the same time we make our own position clear. It is no longer necessary to speak to the lowest common denominator in an attempt to work with large numbers of women. Developing and clarifying our positions also provides a basis for women to decide if they wish to join a group.

This type of organization is bound to be met by criticism from within the Women's Movement. The most common criticisms are listed below:

"These organizations sound rigid and unfree. They do not allow for freedom of choice or for individual expression."

This criticism has an obvious class bias. It comes from persons who believe that it is possible to exercise individual freedom of choice and control over our lives in this society. This is an illusion voiced by upper and middle class women who can afford to mistake impulsive spontaneity for freedom of choice. This misconception could not come from the lower class because they don't pretend to have freedom of choice. They do what they must to survive. Individual expression and freedom of choice in a situation where we have no power can only be tokenism because our possibilities are limited. The only way to expand these possibilities is to organize collectively. A woman may choose to go to medical school, but unless she organizes women within that situation she is forced to deal with the male educational hierarchy on their terms. Organizations are a means of expanding our choices by defining them collectively. The commitment and rules (freely arrived at promises we make to each other) give us a confidence in ourselves and each other and provide a free space where we can develop ideas. Organizations allow individuals to create a situation where we can live out our politics. They create a collective identity that gives us power.

"Establishing organizations on the basis of defined politics fosters divisiveness and factionalism. Women should be working together, not splitting apart on the basis of ideologies."

This criticism denies the importance of ideological struggle in the growth of our movement. We must recognize that there will be internal struggles (disagreement and conflict) for as long as we continue to grow. If we are to make intelligent choices and if we are to learn from our mistakes, these differences must be clearly articulated and understood. To call for unity with no basis is like President Nixon saying that dissent against the war is the single greatest obstacle to peace. Unity comes from the clarification of our differences. It is only when we understand our differences that we understand the basis upon which we are unified. Only the struggle to resolve our differences will give the movement direction.

"By setting standards for membership, organizations are elitist, creating their own definition of who is feminist or who is revolutionary."

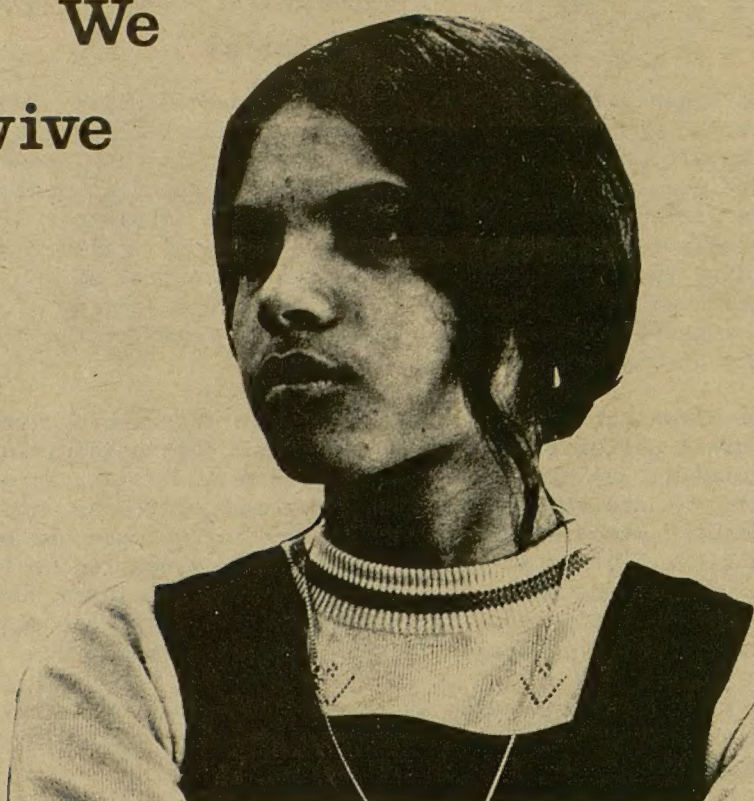
This criticism does not recognize the necessity for people of common political beliefs to form organizations among themselves. One organization will not encompass all women. By defining the political principles of groups, we clarify on what basis new women are welcome. Thus, groups will always remain open to women of similar beliefs.

Being organized is threatening. The force and direction that only organization can provide are the very things that cause women who are not organized to feel pushed. Many criticism against the organized come from those who are unprepared. They obscure the issue by accusing the organized of dominating, appealing again to the lowest common denominator. Rather than making demands on themselves, they require that no one assert herself. We must begin to recognize this misuse of feminist egalitarianism for what it is. It is good that organization forces the unorganized to become organized.

The Feminist Movement has clearly arrived at a new stage in its growth. It is essential that we recognize this stage as different from earlier stages--it has different needs and therefore we must develop different structures. We must at this time make the creation of new structures our priority.

Written by Radical Feminist 28
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Somehow We Survive



Photocell/Clara Gutsche

When I was a child I always dreamed of getting married and having a family of my own. My friends and I would sit around for hours talking about the way we would cook, clean, wash and take care of our homes. I would say that my children would be raised differently because I would not beat them the way my parents beat me, and that I would be good to my husband no matter what he did to me and never leave him. There wasn't much to look forward to in life for my girlfriends and me but to hurry up and get old enough to get married and have children like our parents did. I was always a sad child with no one to comfort me when I cried or was sick. I was anxious for someone to love me. But nobody had time for me. Some nights I would stay up for hours thinking of how I wished I was 18 years old so I could do what I pleased.

I have five sisters and two brothers. We were raised with our mother, no father. My mother came to this country from Puerto Rico when she was very young. About fifteen years ago she started to get asthma so I and my older sister did everything in the house. As soon as we got out of school, we had to hurry home to take care of the smaller ones. My biggest sister finally got married and I was left with all the responsibility in the home. I had to give the children breakfast, dress them and send them to school. After school I'd rush home to clean, cook, and do everything a housewife is expected to do.

So you can see it was no fun being single. I only had two nights a week when I could go out--Tuesday and Saturday from six to ten. And all I wanted for those nights was to see my boyfriend. If he didn't come, I didn't go out at all. I didn't have much of a chance to out with girlfriends because they all had chores to do at home too, and it seemed we never had a time when we were all free. My fun in life depended on my boyfriend. Sometimes he didn't come around, and those were miserable times for me. I would cry for hours about him. My boyfriend was the leader of the Purple Knights, a street gang around the community. He was considered a big man around the neighborhood. Nobody bothered him--he was respected. I knew I wanted to marry him because when I was out with him I felt like somebody. But I didn't realize that the reason was that I just wanted to leave my family because I was unhappy with them.

I did want to graduate from high school. I was the only one in my family so far to do that. The only other thing I wanted was to be with my boyfriend. I loved him. Looking back on it now, I see I looked to him for escape from my problems.

When I was seventeen, I became pregnant. I was happy about this, because my stepfather, who was a very religious man, had prophesized that I would never have children. I really believed him, so I didn't use any birth-control--besides I didn't know where to get it. When I found out I was pregnant, I was scared that he wouldn't marry me. At that time, so many girls I knew got involved like this and then no one would marry them.

When I told my boyfriend I was pregnant he said to me, "I'll marry you, but I'll make a terrible husband." I thought I could change him. All women think they can change men, but somehow we're the ones who get changed.

We got our blood tests that day, a Tuesday, and Sunday we were married. I was afraid for my mother to know I was pregnant--that had already happened to my older sister. I thought I could give my mother some satisfaction by my getting married.

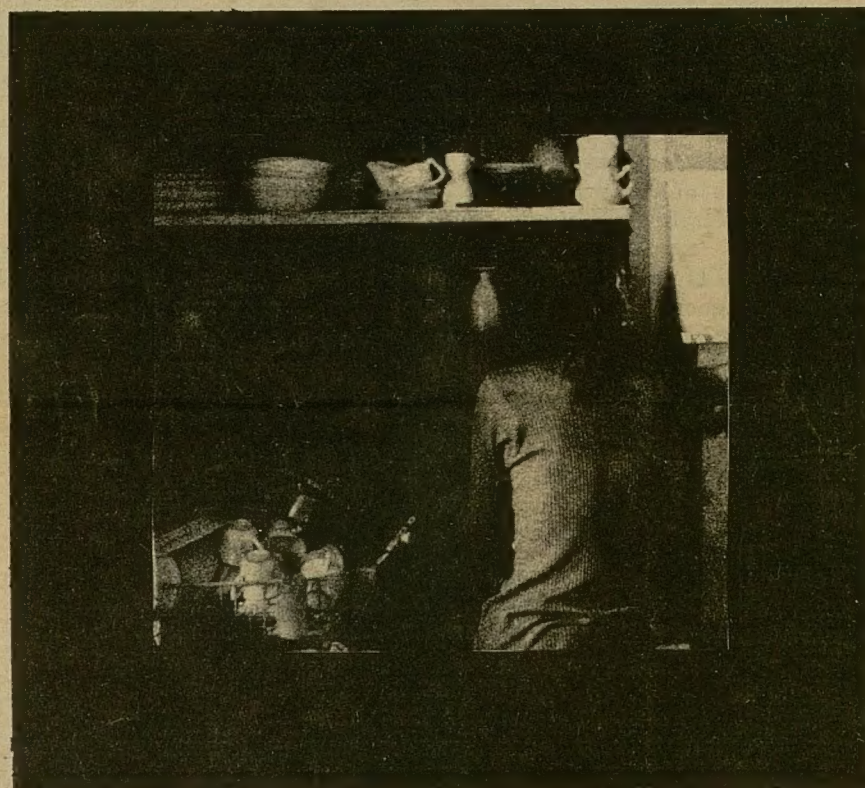
Marriage was such an important thing. If you got married, you were the perfect girl in the eyes of the community. If you got married, you made the whole block happy. You were considered a decent girl.

The first year, we lived with my mother. We both worked and each brought home \$44. a week. I worked in a factory--what a horrible job that was. He was a stock boy at Best and Co. At that time he felt he had a good job. I felt lucky to have married him. A lot of my girlfriends liked him, too, and I felt I had won the competition for him. He helped a lot when the baby came. He would change him and feed him. In fact, sometimes he would fight with me about it--he felt that the baby shouldn't have to cry for food, that he should have everything he wanted. We left my mother's house because my brother built a pigeon coop on the roof and the roof fell in--it was such a run-down building. It could have hurt my son.

Soon my husband started to feel that he should have a better job. He had been very respected and a leader in the neighborhood, but when he went to look for jobs, there was no respect for him. He wanted to be a boxer and he was very good at that. He won a lot of fights and he was supposed to be in training. I tried to help him, to fix the right foods for someone in training and I wanted to watch him fight. But he wouldn't let me--he was afraid for me to see him fail. It was hard for him to get another job because he couldn't read and write--so he couldn't fill out the applications. He couldn't earn enough money to support us and he was losing my love. He started drinking and playing cards or basketball on the block all day.

Meanwhile, I was working as a waitress at White Castle restaurant earning \$63.00 for six eight-and-a-half hour days a week. By the time I had paid my sister-in-law \$15.00 for baby-sitting, \$70.00 for rent, and \$15.00 for groceries I didn't have a penny left. I would come home after being bothered by rude people at the restaurant all day long, and I had to start to cook, clean, diaper, wash dishes, etc. I went to sleep so exhausted that I didn't want to be bothered with anything. I told my husband if he wasn't going to work he should babysit for me and do things around the house. He refused.

I knew I had to do something and do it right away. One day he left as usual to hang out down the street and I went to my sister to ask her to lend me money for an apartment. After looking for two days, I found one and I moved. My baby was then two-and-a-half and it was hard for me to find a babysitter to take care of him while I worked. So I left him with my mother and picked him up on weekends. I worked like this for about three months, but I missed my son a lot so I decided to go on welfare. I had to lie to them and tell them I was pregnant again.



Carol Glasswoman

My husband started using drugs when I left him. We changed our lives when we left each other. Sometimes I went out and got drunk because I didn't think I had much to look forward to. I am sure that if we had stayed married, I would be in a mental institution. Pretty soon I decided to get a job again. I hated welfare. I looked for a secretarial job because I knew how to type. They gave me tests and I passed them--they said they'd call me. They never did. At another place, they asked me if I was single. I lied and said I was and that I had no children. They said they'd call me. They never did. I never forgot those people who refused me jobs. So many people screwed me up. Finally, I got a part-time waitress job. I ended up doing more than waitressing--I was handling legal documents and taking care of money and stock. Even though I was paid only \$1.25 an hour, I learned I wasn't stupid, I could handle a lot. I even thought I could have run my own restaurant.

When I was sober, I would think what I am going to do with myself? What's going to happen to my son? My biggest worry was that what happened to me would happen to my son. I wanted to look at life differently. This is when I began to change my life. I went to Hunt's Point Community Center. They said they had a job for me in the Women's Talent Corps at the College for Human Services. This is one of the many programs that are opening up in New York City for poor and minority-group women. It trains us to be "para-professionals"--assistants to teachers, lawyers, etc. There are a lot of good things about these programs. I was with other women like me. All the women in the program had children, we were all in the same bag. We had all gone through hell. We went to classes three days a week and the other two days we worked, mostly in the public schools as educational assistants. But we found after we had finished the two-year program that it really didn't change our lives very much. We still had children and no one to take care of them. The only kinds of jobs we could get didn't pay enough to live on. The only way that training was worth something was to go on and finish college.

The reason I and other women were able to go to the College for Human Services and not to a regular four-year college was that we were able to combine school and work there and get a stipend for both. A lot of funds seem to have recently been made available for these kinds of programs. I wonder why there aren't programs with the same stipends for low-income women that would train us for jobs that aren't so low paid and dead-end.

When I finished at the College for Human Services I got a job working nights and week-ends as a barmaid and entered Hunter College. I was able to make more as a barmaid than as an educational assistant.

When I started Hunter I was very excited and anxious to learn. I thought the courses would be very exciting and I would learn but as time went by, I hated it more and more because the professors are very boring and I'm not learning anything. Every semester I have to buy seven to ten books which I don't even look at unless I really have to. I really can't wait to get out of college.

I want to teach in the near future but I feel that nothing that is being taught at Hunter will help me do this. I want to teach in the ghetto and the courses at college are not relevant to what I want or need to learn.

I think this is one of the reasons why so many teachers are failing to teach our children. Not too long ago I was sitting in a science class when the professor said, "When you start to teach science in the schools you will not have any problems because your students will have all the equipment they need at home." I couldn't believe what he had said because he said that he had been teaching in an elementary school for 20 years. I wanted to tell him that the first time I saw a microscope I was 14 years old, but I knew it wouldn't have made a difference to him.

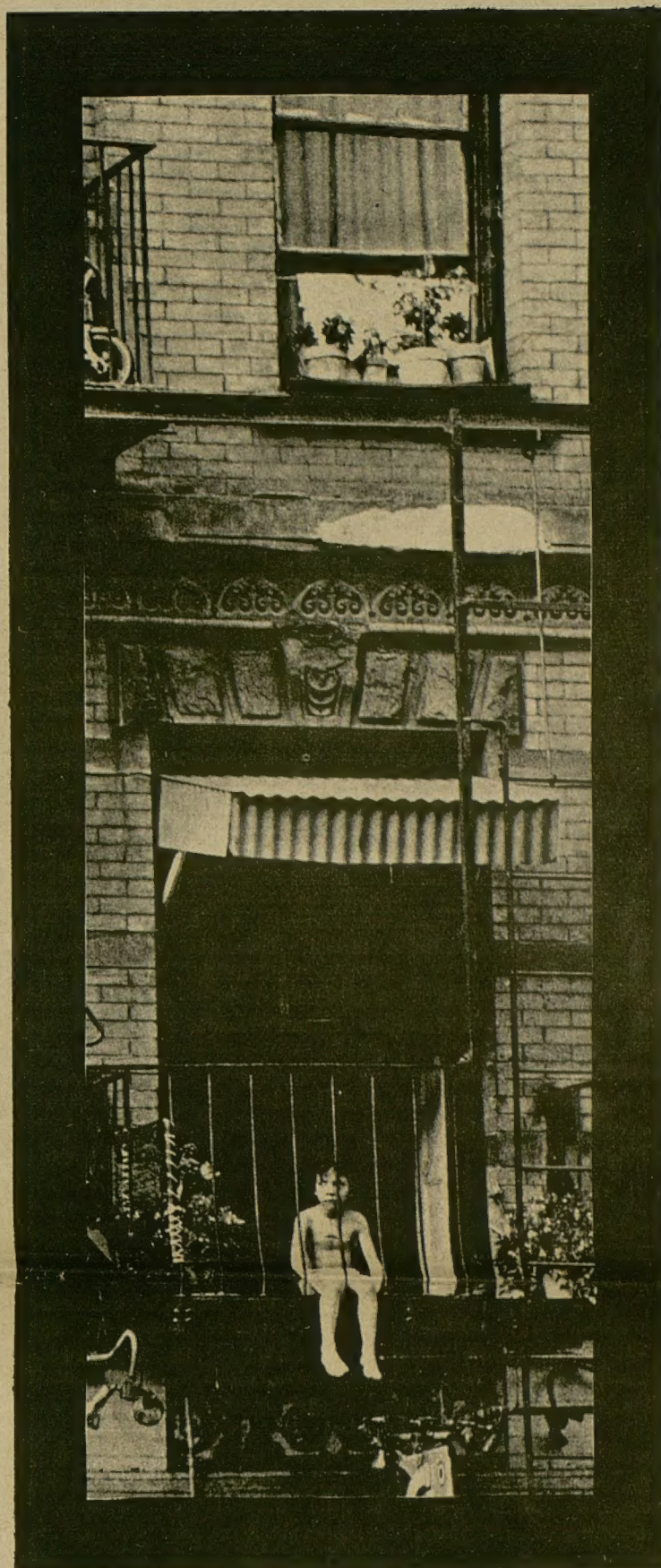
At first I didn't take being an educational assistant seriously. I saw it was a way to get money--I thought it was a more decent way than being a barmaid or a go-go dancer. Then I became part of it. I stopped thinking about just the pay and I started thinking about the future. I got very interested in the kids in the school, I used to cry about them. I saw me in every single kid, and I'd rather be dead than be a child again.

I began to become aware of things around me and wonder what I could do about them. I knew that black and Puerto Rican children in ghetto schools don't want to hear about two plus two--they want to get out of the bad conditions they live in. When I finish school I might go to Puerto Rico. I will probably have to live on fresh air because the pay there is very low. I feel Puerto Rico is being taken over by the same upper class whites like Nixon and Rockefeller who have messed up the United States and the rest of the world. They are the ones who decide what happens. I want to go to Puerto Rico and teach--but I want to teach what I feel should be taught.

I think our people have got to get together in organizations like the Young Lords. When the Young Lords first started to organize to help in the Puerto Rican communities they were doing a lot of good things for the people. A lot of junkies and prostitutes say, "I have to kick my habit so I can be with the Young Lords." I think it is the best organization Puerto Ricans ever had. I know they helped me to realize a lot of things.

One of the things the Young Lords tried to do was to bring Community Control to Lincoln Hospital. Lincoln Hospital is in the Southeast Bronx and serves mostly Puerto Rican people. One day I was at the hospital waiting to be called on so I could have some stitches taken off my elbow. I was sitting there for about two-and-a-half hours and nobody called me. That was the day the Lords came to the hospital. When I saw them come into the Emergency Room I jumped up off my seat and I went up to the desk and asked the woman why I was not being called on. Some of the Lords were standing next to me. She apologized and took my file to the doctor and in a few minutes I was called on. I knew the reason was because the Lords would have done something about it. I think it is a strong and united organization and there should be more like it.

I have trained my son to feel a little of what I feel--for himself, for people, for life. If I can't get a good babysitter



Jean Raister

for him, I may have to drop out of school. I'm trying to keep my son from going through what I went through. I go to bed and cry sometimes because I yell at him for no reason. I have to answer his questions. He knows his father is an addict but he still loves him. One day he went to see his father and when he returned he said, "Daddy said he's sick and he needs a needle. I know it's not cause he's sick, it's because he's a junkie." I tell him it's not his father's fault; New York City did that to him.

My son is six now, and if I keep living here I might not be able to change him. A lot of people try to bring up their kids different, but you can't keep them locked in the house. So, no matter how hard you try in your own house, if the conditions and the drugs and the schools don't change, the people can't change either. I want to stay with my people and change things with them, but I worry that my son will get messed up.

I want to make more people aware of our struggle. What changed me was being aware of what was going on in the neighborhood. I don't want just a beautiful home or car or things for my own comfort. I want to help change things for my son and kids like him so they turn to each other and not to drugs. Right now I'm still changing. At the end I might not know who I was. But the only way that things can really change for anyone is if they change for everyone.

Norma Ortiz

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Gilda Kuhlman

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